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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MNUC](#) [NZ](#)  
SUBJECT: CDR CENTCOM VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND

Classified By: Classified By: DCM Ambassador William P. McCormick; Reas  
on 1.4 (A and D)

11. (C) Summary: General Abizaid's February 23-25 visit to New Zealand came one month after Admiral Fallon's visit amid high media interest in the bilateral relationship. The General met with Prime Minister Clark, Defense Minister Goff and Foreign Minister Winston Peters, as well as with Chief of Defense Force Bruce Ferguson and other Defense Force (NZDF) officials. He also toured some of the local Wellington sites and was received by a traditional Maori welcome ceremony upon arrival. There was a short photo opportunity with the Prime Minister prior to the meeting and a small media availability at the NZ Defense HQ. The General met with the NZ military service chiefs, participated in a government roundtable and gave the CENTCOM "Long War" presentation to several hundred NZDF personnel. Despite a minor flap over press arrangements before the visit, neither the PM nor other Kiwi officials tried to hijack the visit to claim all was well with the U.S.-NZ relationship. The Embassy considers this a victory. End Summary.

12. (C) General Abizaid's February 23-25 visit to New Zealand came on the heels of Admiral Fallon's visit last month. But unlike ADM Fallon, who is the regional U.S. commander for New Zealand and has operational responsibilities here, GEN Abizaid's status as a guest in the PACOM AOR called for a much lower-key media stance. CENTCOM's visit was hosted by outgoing Chief of Defense Force Bruce Ferguson, who is due to retire in April. The General was introduced to and had meetings with the candidates vying for AM Ferguson's position -- Army Chief MAJGEN Jerry Mateparae, AF Chief AVM John Hamilton, Navy Chief RADM David Ledson, Joint Forces CDR MAJGEN Lou Gardiner and Vice CDF AVM David Bamfield.

13. (C) The meeting with Prime Minister Helen Clark went very well. Several days before the visit, however, the PM's Press Secretary stated PM's desire to do a full-on press conference

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after the office call with TV cameras, radio, etc. We pushed back with CENTCOM's request, noting that such high visibility would be inappropriate since the General was in NZ at the invitation of the NZDF and has no operational responsibilities in this region. After a few high-level phone calls it was agreed that there would be a photo availability prior to the meeting and no press conference. We were leery because the PM has previously used opportunities such as this for domestic political purposes or

to claim the U.S. and New Zealand have completely moved beyond the anti-nuclear legislation disagreement. However, at the office call, the PM immediately ushered in the General into her office after the photo opportunity. The press did not wait in ambush after the meeting. (Comment: While negotiations over the media coverage got quite heated at times, this event shows that a firm stance by the Embassy will, in the end, be respected. End comment)

14. (C) After a brief welcome, the meeting started with the General thanking the PM for NZ's contribution to Afghanistan (PRT and Special Forces) and Iraq (Combat Engineers). He said the PRT in Bamyan is a good model to follow and the NZ troops were very effective in dealing with the locals. He pointed out that the new PRTs being established by the Australians and the Dutch (under NATO) will be challenged by the Taliban to test their resolve. The General also said the British troops soon deploying to Helmand Province would be challenged. Their opposition will most likely be drug lords, however, not the Taliban. Helmand Province is a prime poppy growing area and has, up to this point, remained relatively unchallenged by any authoritarian entity. The PM thanked the General for his comments and said that because NZ troops are a multicultural and diverse group and have deployed to places like East Timor and Bosnia, locals tend to like NZ troops. The PM then asked about the how attacks have changed. The General replied that in Afghanistan, the Taliban-Al Q'aida forces have shifted to a doctrine of IEDs, suicide bombers, and assassination of local government leaders because military-style attacks on U.S. military forces just don't work. The General also told the PM that the enemy foot soldiers and suicide attackers are not Arab -- they are mostly Pakistanis (Pashtuns or Punjabis). This differs from Iraq where significant portions are foreign Arabs. The PM asked if there was evidence of Taliban-Al Q'aida forces working on nuclear or biological weapons and the General responded Coalition forces found evidence of attempts to weaponize anthrax in the enemy's possession. That effort was stopped but it was important to keep the enemy on the run so they couldn't regroup and develop other sinister weapons or tactics. He told the PM that we shouldn't underestimate the enemy's ability to survive and they may take harbor in uncontrolled areas of Somalia, Kenya and the Horn of Africa as well as Indonesia, Philippines and Southern Thailand. He reiterated to the PM that Al Q'aida must not be allowed to become "mainstream" and used the analogy of Hitler in the 1920s and 1930s. The PM said NZ has been pleased to provide military support and that she expected continued deployments of the PRT past the Sept 2006 deployment end date. That decision will be made soon by the government and she doesn't expect the U.S. government will be disappointed by the outcome.

15. (C) Defense Minister Phil Goff discussed many of the same issues with the General. Goff mentioned to the General (as he does with virtually all U.S. officials) that he had two nephews that were West Point graduates and felt a closeness to the U.S. Army. Goff told the General that he could expect a positive outcome on redeploying the PRT past Sept 2006 and was reasonably assured the SAS (Special Forces) would deploy again after regeneration. The 65 SAS troops returned to NZ in Nov 2005 and aren't expected to be able to redeploy in 2006 due to training, attrition and other internal NZ Army issues. The General told Goff that even though NATO is taking over deployments in parts of Afghanistan, the U.S. will continue to be the largest contributor to NATO forces. The General continued by saying that Pakistan will eventually be threatened by the Taliban so we need all the help available to stabilize the region. The General told Goff that patrol assets from NZ (P-3s or Frigates) were always welcome and definitely helpful. Goff responded by saying it was always a battle with the Finance Minister on deploying platform assets to that region but he would continue to press for this. When Goff asked about Iran, the General replied that the current Iranian administration is a difficult one to deal with and that we shouldn't take the Iranian President's comments lightly. As political pressure mounts on Iran, they will attempt distractions, but the more political pressure

from more countries that is applied, the better the eventual outcome will be. The General was asked about possible civil war in Iraq due to the recent mosque bombing. The General said the leaders in Iraq are doing a great job trying to maintain the peace. Even Al Sistani was promoting calm. The General said there were many more people in Iraq who wanted peace and stability than want a civil war. The general then answered questions about Saudi Arabia, Oman, UAE and Hamas. Goff ended the meeting with the comment that NZ will watch the Israel-Palestine issue closely.

¶16. (C) General Abizaid then met with Foreign Minister Winston Peters. Peters started the meeting by saying his recent comments on the U.S. lack of recognition of NZ contributions in the South Pacific were "misread." Peters said that the South Pacific falls under the radar screen and recognition of NZ efforts were overshadowed by other world events. The General responded by defining CENTCOM's area of responsibility, which does not include the Pacific, and thanked New Zealand for the SAS and PRT deployments. Peters said the General's visit was significant in that it would let New Zealanders know how important their contributions are in Afghanistan. Peters was told, as was Goff and the PM, that Afghanistan would take longer to fix than Iraq. Iraq, although unstable, has an economy and infrastructure that would enable rapid recovery once the government takes hold. Afghanistan has too many uncontrolled areas and a dismal infrastructure and would take much longer. The discussion ended with the General saying he hoped for international solidarity on dealing with wild-card Iran. That would be the only way to lead Iran down the right path.

¶17. (C) General Abizaid had a roundtable with various members from the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Questions ranged from the spreading of Al Q'aida, to the big picture for counter-terrorism, to United Nations and NGOs, in addition to the questions addressed to the PM, DM and FM. The General told the group that we need to do better in tracking money flow, stopping Al Q'aida using U.S. internet servers for their use and curbing the ability of AQ to use Europe as a virtual safehaven for broad-based planning. The general told the group that not all NGOs are good...some ne'er-do-well organizations are able to inject their nefarious agendas into uneducated areas causing more problems. Pakistan is going through this, currently. The General also pointed out that international cooperation was paramount in counter-terrorism, in areas such as document control (passports, visas, etc), border control, preventing failed states before they happened, providing leadership for getting the job done rather than relying on the U.S. military as a hammer, and providing support, physical or moral, to those countries doing the hard work.

¶18. (C) A short (15-minute) press availability with the General was made to a group of three NZ journalists, hand-picked by the Embassy Public Affairs Assistant. The meeting went very well and the reports printed the next day in NZ media were straightforward and accurate.

¶19. (C) General Abizaid gave a 30-minute presentation to about 200 NZDF personnel, many of whom have served in Afghanistan or Iraq, and followed with a 30-minute Q and A period. The presentation was very well received, judging by the ovation at its conclusion. NZ civilians and press were not invited.

¶10. (C) There were three protestors at the airport (two of them Amcits) staging a small but loud (bullhorn) demonstration upon the CENTCOM aircraft's arrival. Small demonstrations were also located at the Embassy (one-person) and at NZDF HQ (approx 10 persons). All demonstrations were on the first day. There were no others on day two or on the General's departure on day three.

¶11. (C) Comment: General Abizaid's visit came at a time when 4-star visits to NZ have exceeded the average for the past few years. In the last 30 days alone, NZ has received three

4-star officers. The General's visit comes at a good time, however, as New Zealand is debating the redeployment of SAS Special Forces and the PRT, both in Afghanistan. The General, as well as Admiral Fallon last month, thanked New Zealand for their contributions in world events ) contrary to what FM Peters stated early last week that the U.S. doesn't recognize NZ contributions in the Pacific. Nevertheless, gaining support for NZ troops to continue deploying to Afghanistan was successful and as the PM and DM indicated, the deployments will continue. Media exposure was not overdone and had the right tone and message. Lastly, at the Ambassador's and CENTCOM's request, PM Clark did a great job of not politicizing the visit, nor using media circuses for domestic political purposes that undercut U.S. interests. McCormick